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August 5, 2010

The Honorable Jerry Hill
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 4146
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Hill:

Thank you for contacting my office when you and other San Mateo County voters did not receive their Official Voter Information Guide for the June 8 Statewide Direct Primary Election. I share your concern about why this important election information did not get to you and many other voters in San Mateo County, and I truly appreciate you taking the time to bring the postal problem to my attention.

The Secretary of State's Official Voter Information Guides for the June 8 statewide primary were required by law to be mailed to every voter household no later than May 18. After my office's responsibilities for printing the state voter guides and providing mailing address data were completed, I was assured by mailing contractors that the state voter guides addressed to San Mateo County voter households were mailed ahead of schedule and arrived in a regional U.S. Postal Service facility on time.

As soon as you and other San Mateo County voters notified my office of the postal problem, my staff began investigating and encountered some incredibly frustrating obstacles. Since I now know more about what went wrong after the state voter guides left my control, I want to share the additional information with you.

First, although it is not acceptable that a household entitled to receive a state voter guide did not get one, state voter guides were easily available through multiple sources – including the Internet and at every polling place, every county elections office and every public library.

There were several other entities involved in the state voter guide printing and mailing processes: the California Office of State Publishing, the U.S. Postal Service, Admail West and Peachtree Data, Inc. After weeks of forensic research and repeated requests for evidence from all potentially responsible parties, I have learned that Admail West made significant errors.

Admail West managers have admitted their company is responsible for duplicate or triplicate mailings of state voter guides to voter households in some counties, while at the same time failing to mail a single state voter guide to other households. No one at Admail West has ever been able to fully explain the extent of the mailing problem, or why the company did not have better quality-assurance procedures in place for such an important statewide project. Moreover, Admail West managers reported that the one employee who handled the mailing data and caused

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the San Mateo County mailing errors passed away in June, and many key details are not known by anyone else at the company. A representative of Admail West wrote:

"Please know that we take the election process very seriously... We understand the importance and the obligation that is asked of us... It is unacceptable to us that this has occurred and you have our word that this will never happen again. Please accept our apologies."

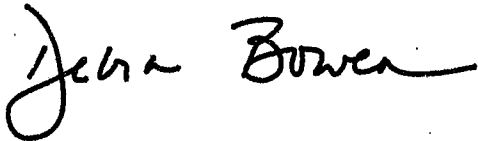
Regardless of who at Admail West is at fault for this major mistake, there is no excuse for the sloppy tracking and lack of quality control by any vendor when the Secretary of State's office provides extremely clear mailing specifications and voter address data.

Like all mail that any agency or person sends, official state mail can be tracked only to a certain point in the process after leaving the sender's control. And while it is understandable that the mailing of 11 million state voter guides can never be perfect, it is absolutely unacceptable that many San Mateo County voters did not receive their state voter guides while other voters received duplicate mailings.

This egregious mailing error reinforces the fact that nonpartisan election materials are very important to voters. Although I was able to make the June 8 state voter guides available in other ways through my website, every polling place, every county elections office and every public library, voters truly do rely on having that information arrive in their mailbox.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Ronda Paschal, my Deputy Secretary of State for Legislative and Constituent Affairs at (916) 653-6774.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Bowen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Debra" and last name "Bowen" clearly distinguishable.

Debra Bowen
Secretary of State

DB:elg:rp:op